May Day

"The weather was perfect and the green lawns formed a fitting background for the festivities which took place, as we celebrated our first real 'May Day'." – 1902 Pharetra

Begun in 1902 as May Day, this annual spring ritual developed from the medieval celebration of spring. Many women's colleges counted May Day among their traditions. These celebrations often followed the patterns of the traditional English May Day celebration including dancing around a Maypole, nominating a May court, and crowning a May Queen.

In early Wilson history, each class was given a class flower (rather than a color, as would later be the case) to represent them. For the very first May Day, each class dressed as their class flower: Freshmen as dark red poppies, sophomores as violets, juniors as daisies, and seniors in yellow and brown. The prep students were water lilies and the non-degree students were apple blossoms. The classes processed across campus. The first May Queen, Margaret Mosser (1902), led the senior class with her twenty attendants. Representative members of the four classes then danced around the maypole. The May Queen was presented with a crown, scepter and globe by the junior, sophomore, and freshman classes, a tradition that continues to this day.

The first time Queen Bess was added to Wilson's May Day celebration was in 1908. She was accompanied by a court and "an Old English festival provided entertainment" for them. Today, in order to qualify for the role of Queen Bess, the only qualification is to have naturally red hair.

Each May Day revolved around a specific, and often elaborate, theme. These included: Tamlane Amasque in 1915, Roman chariot races in 1924, King Arthur's Court in 1925, Alice in Wonderland in 1942, The Greatest Show on Earth circus in 1953, an American Indian pow wow in 1999, and a Masquerade in 2011. In 1953, the May Day theme was The Greatest Show on Earth. More than 50 students prepared a circus show for the May Court with dancing, snake charming, acrobats, and clowns. The circus theme invaded every aspect of the weekend from the traditional dance to the father-daughter softball game.

May Day activities have often been used to raise funds for charities or scholarships. In 1942, Wilson presented "No Malice Toward Alice" a production of more than 200 actors, dancers, and musicians to raise funds for the Red Cross.

An important part of the May Day weekend are activity booths sponsored by different campus organizations. Booth activities include everything from dart throwing to henna tattoos to selling books. In 1962 the majority of the May Day proceeds went toward a scholarship fund for one international student for one year.

Wilson still has a May Court and a weekend of activities, but the event was renamed Spring Fling in 1996. Many of the traditions have survived such as the maypole dance, the booths, and even the traditional gifts to the May Queen. In addition, Spring Fling also includes a dog show and a semi-formal dinner/dance. The weekend is not as extravagant as it once was, but continues to be a much-anticipated part of the Wilson experience.

1015 Philadelphia Ave.,
Chambersburg, PA 17201

717-262-2002
admissions@wilson.edu

FOLLOW US...

English

Wilson College is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 1007 North Orange St., 4th Floor, MB #166, Wilmington, DE. 19801. (Telephone: 267-284-5011)